DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 777 JC 920 253

AUTHOR Ferry, Cliff
TITLE Employer Occupational Needs Assessment, Elko, Nevada, Spring, 1991. Final Report.
INSTITUTION Northern Nevada Community Coll., Elko.
SPONS AGENCY Nevada State Dept. of Education, Carson City. Occupational Education Branch.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 14p.; Project funded in part by a Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act Grant.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Programs; Community Colleges; Courses; Demand Occupations; *Employer Attitudes; Interviews; *Job Skills; *Job Training; Labor Force Development; *Labor Needs; Needs Assessment; Occupational Surveys; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

In spring 1991, a survey was conducted by Northern Nevada Community College (NNCC) to determine the vocational education needs of local employers. Ninety-one employers were interviewed at their worksites using a modified open-ended question approach. Survey findings included the following: (1) employers most frequently used newspapers to obtain information about the college; (2) 68% of the employers had employees who had attended NNCC; (3) employers most frequently recommended that seminars, workshops, and short courses focus on computer education, while areas not currently well covered by NNCC offerings, but of interest to employers, included personnel administration, marketing/advertising, and office management; (4) 48% of the employers wanted more evening, weekend, and one-day seminars and more flexible scheduling; (5) although a number of different new certificate/associate degree programs were suggested by the employers, no one program was suggested by more than three respondents; (6) 75% of the employers expressed an interest in learning more about cooperative education; (7) 24% of the employers reported having limited English-speaking employees, and all but one of these wanted more information about NNCC's English as a Second Language classes; (8) 19% of the employers reported having employees whose limited literacy skills reduced their job productivity, and all but one of these wanted to learn more about NNCC's adult literacy classes; and (9) reading/writing skill was the most frequently cited desired quality in occupational education students (18.2%), while technical skill was cited by only 8.9% of the employers. A list of companies, agencies, and professionals interviewed is attached. (JSP)

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Conducted By

NORTHERN NEVADA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FINAL REPORT

Cliff Ferry

Employer Occupational Needs Assessment

Elko, Nevada

Spring, 1991

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(1) The ninety-one business, agency, and professional people were demonstrably pleased to participate in the study and give of their time.

(2) There was a strong feeling of employer satisfaction with NNCC and its mission in the community.

(3) Interviewers have a suspicion that employers do not know as much about NNCC and its programs than was assumed by college people.

(4) The newspaper was far and away the most frequent source of information about the college among employers.

(5) Sixty-eight percent of employers interviewed have employees who have attended NNCC at one time or another. There was considerable satisfaction from the employers' knowledge in the classes.

(6) For short courses, seminars, etc. employers recommended continued computer classes. In areas not currently well covered at NNCC, personnel administration was mentioned by about 1/3 of employers — a considerable, unexpected response. Marketing/ advertising and office management were suggested by a significant number. Employers, also, asked for more short courses, flexibly scheduled. They also requested more publicity about the courses.

(7) There was not a strong demand for any one new certificate/associate program, though a number of different programs were suggested.

(8) There are a few continuing education programs that NNCC might offer; many of the continuing ed requirements for various professions are too technical for the college.

(9) Employers were very interested in cooperative education. Seventy-one percent of those interviewed wanted more information.

(10) Nearly one-fourth of the employers have limited English-speaking employees and most of these employers desired more information about NNCC's English as a Second Language programs.

(11) Nineteen percent of employers said they have employees with limited literacy skills. All but one of these employers wanted more information about NNCC's adult literacy programs.

(12) Reading/writing skill was most frequently cited as a desired quality for occupational education students (18.2% of employers), compared to technical skills, mentioned by only 8.9% of the employers.

BACKGROUND

For three years, NNCC has received monies from a Perkins grant to support the Center for Mining Education. During this period of time, NNCC has forged significant partnerships with local mining companies for training, particularly for maintenance technicians. As part of the application process for Carl Perkins vocational education funds during the Spring of 1990, the State Department of Education suggested that we expand our economic development activities beyond the mining industry. The College was not certain what these activities should be. So it became appropriate and natural to survey a sample of employers. It was also decided that an on-site interview with a company or agency representative would be preferable to mailed questionnaires or telephone interviews. From February to May, 1991, ninety-one (91) employers were interviewed at their worksites.

In addition to gathering information on occupational training needs, the survey was also designed to include evaluative questions about occupational programs and the college as a whole.

Initially, the project was to include a sample of employers in Ely and Winnemucca. But time ran out. These communities will be surveyed during 1991/92.

Although there were several mining vendors included, mining companies were not part of the survey, mainly because NNCC has enough contact with the mining community to be alert to their needs.

This report does not make specific recommendations. College personnel and advisory committees will use the data to make decisions about various programs.

Special thanks go to the interviewers Pat Collins, Louis Horton, Jeanette Baker, and Jill Stringfield, who reported that they learned a great deal about area businesses, agencies, and the community, and thoroughly enjoyed the interviewing. Thanks also to NNCC administrative assistant Shirley Chantrill, who made the interview appointments, maintained interview responses in a data base, and generally kept the project moving. The project was directed by Dr. Cliff Ferry, NNCC Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Thanks surely go to the business people and agency officials who participated and were willing to schedule an interview during a busy schedule.

A needs assessment such as this will be carried out again in the future. In the meantime, any person in the business community is encouraged to call NNCC with further suggestions.

PROCEDURES

The survey instrument was developed by Cliff Ferry and critiqued several times by a Research Methods class that he was teaching at the time. The survey was also reviewed by several NNCC Administrators. Reviewers supported the notion of a work-site interview with a modified open-ended question approach. Though technically a needs assessment, the project also has public relations and evaluative functions.

The sample of business and agencies is not a scientific sample. It contains the largest companies in Elko and an attempt was made in selecting companies that represent a wide ranges of types — real estate to hospitals, to title insurance companies, supermarkets, etc. After the companies and agencies were selected, the general manager was sent a letter explaining the needs assessment and that a phone call would follow asking for an interview time. In most instances we were able to give a variety of interview times.

Three businesses contracted were not interested in participating, and four were so busy that we were unable to schedule an interview within the time frame of the project.

The interviewers were given a short training session that dealt with the purpose of the survey, the use of follow-up or probe questions as appropriate, and ways to "deflect" negative remarks. The interviewers were not expected to record verbatim everything that was said. They were urged to summarize and record what they felt were the most significant and helpful responses. The interviewers, as faculty and former faculty, were all knowledgeable about the college and in many instances had the opportunity to provide information about the college.

Most interviews were about 30 minutes in length, though the range was from 15 minutes to over an hour. The interviewers reported that everyone they talked with was eager to assist the college in the project. There were few broken appointments.

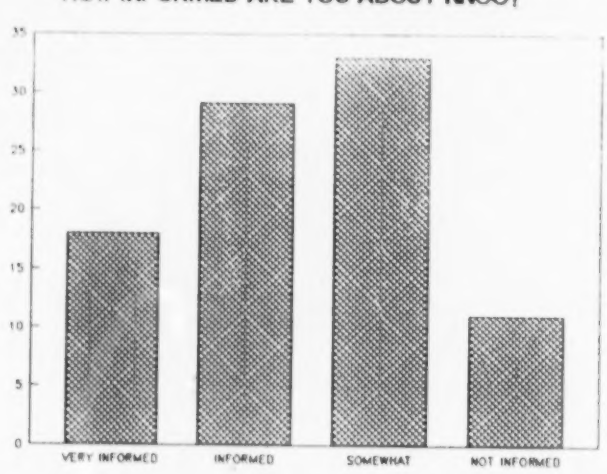
Within a week or so after the interview, a thank-you letter was sent and signed by the person who had done the interviewing.

FINDINGS

The following gives the ratings and a summary/interpretation of the responses to the open-ended questions.

Item #1:

How informed do you consider yourself about NNCC and the College's programs?



The self-reports on how knowledgeable the respondents are about the college may be a bit inflated. Certainly a large percentage of the respondents do not have wide knowledge of the college, and those who responded in the category ***Somewhat Knowledgeable*** may have limited knowledge.

The following indicates the primacy of the newspaper for employers as the source of information about NNCC with well over half the responses indicated newspaper — tabloid and articles. There remains a feeling that employers do not know as much about the college as we assume they do.

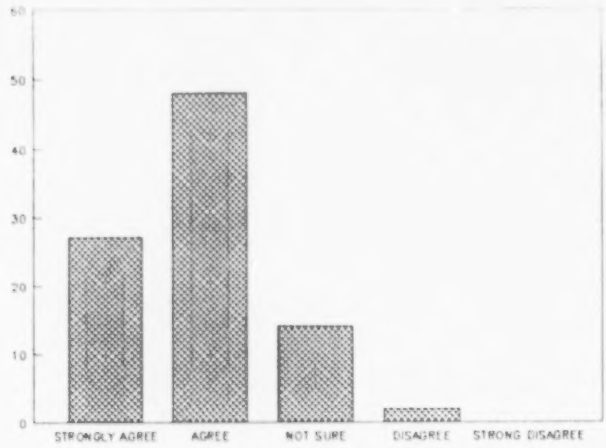
How do you get your information about the College?

Tabloid (Semester Schedule of Courses)	38	35.5%
Newspaper Articles/Advertisements	21	19.6%
Know NNCC Personnel	19	17.8%
Are or were Students at College	9	8.4%
NNCC Catalog	6	5.6%
Member of an NNCC Advisory Board	5	4.7%
Radio	5	4.7%
Employees Attend	4	3.7%

Item #2:

Overall, NNCC provides important services to the community in occupational education, transfer, community services and developmental programs.

NNCC PROVIDES IMPORTANT SERVICES?



There was a wide range of comments. Most frequent comments were that Elko was fortunate to have such a good college, occupational programs are helpful, don't know enough about the college to comment, and too much emphasis upon mining programs.

Sample comments include:

- *Good to have college in Elko — a small town — with a variety of courses and good instructors.*
- *Concentrate on what people can do when they get out and don't worry about having a place where students can have donuts and coffee.*
- *Valuable employment base training.*
- *Have heard nothing but good about NNCC.*
- *Don't really know much about the college.*
- *Programs with mines, adult education, and nursing are excellent.*
- *Most worthwhile role of NNCC is the exposure to thoughts and training that lead to greater knowledge or inspires further education and training.*
- *People hired through the Single Parent Center have been very well trained.*
- *Progressive college answering the needs of the community.*
- *Too much time with mining, look at other sectors of the economy.*
- *Community college is very necessary for a community of this size. Provides opportunities for high school graduates to have affordable education as well as allowing adults to gain continuing education.*

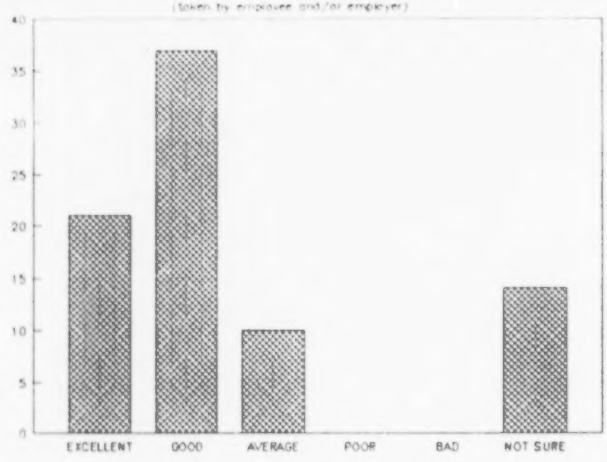
Item #3:

Have you or your employees taken occupational classes at NNCC?

Of the employers surveyed, sixty-two (62) said that they or employees have taken classes at some time. A total of ninety (90) courses were mentioned with computers and word processing dominating (mentioned by 29 respondents). Not surprisingly, business courses were mentioned frequently. One employer said that he comes to expect to see NNCC on employment applicants' resumes.

Were they (the classes) EXCELLENT, GOOD, AVERAGE, POOR, NOT SURE?

RATE CLASSES ATTENDED AT NNCC



This response is very good. The *not sure* category means that the employer did not know what his/her employee thought of the class. Computer classes were mentioned by a number of respondents as being good.

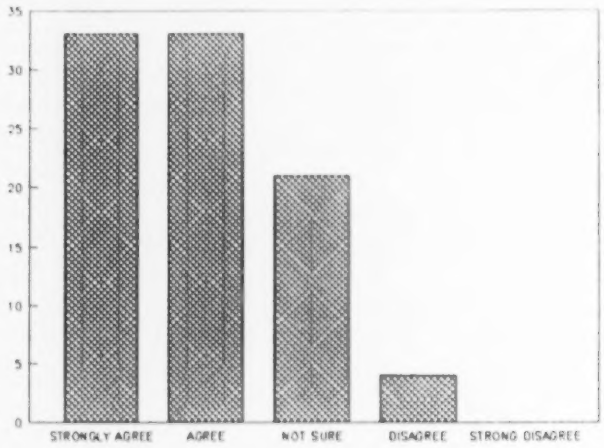
Sample comments:

- *Computer classes and clerical skills program were excellent.*
- *Some classes are good, some are poor.*
- *As good in quality as anywhere else.*
- *Based on job performance of two employees that have taken classes (diesel and computers), NNCC's classes were very good.*
- *Welding class — good program over all.*
- *Still use what I learned in John Pryor's class. Is he still there?*
- *Not aware if employees have taken classes. Have inquired about personnel management courses but they were not offered at the time.*

Item #4:

Short courses, seminars, workshops, and other educational activities are important for employees in your company.

SHORT COURSES . . . WORKSHOPS ARE IMPORTANT



What are seminars, workshops, and short courses that NNCC should offer?

At this point the respondents were given a list of courses that NNCC does or can offer. Based on this list and other suggestions, the following recommendations were made by sixty-eight (68) of the business and agency people interviewed. The number after the course indicates total number of employers interested in that particular program.

Automotive	3	Diesel Technology	5
Electronic Systems	1	Fire/Safety Training	7
Business Administration	9	Inventory/Prod. Control	2
Office Management	10	Law Enforcement	4
Child Care/Parenting	1	Marketing/Advertising	13
Computer Education	38	Customer Service	9
WordPerfect	5	Selling Techniques	5
Lotus	2	Receptionist Workshop	5
CAD	1	MSHA Safety Training	5
DOS	2	Nursing C.C.	1
Desktop Publishing	1	Personnel Management	32
UNIX	1	Supervisory Training	4
Graphics	1	Real Estate C.E.	3
		Welding	5

Areas with responses of five or more — business administration, computer education, diesel technology, MSHA safety training, and welding — are relatively well-covered each semester. The following are areas of need, starting with the most frequently mentioned:

Personnel Management	Marketing/Advertising
Office Management	Customer Service
Fire/Safety Training	Selling Techniques
Receptionist Workshop	

These areas are covered by occasional courses but not to the breadth and depth implied in the interviews. The interest in personnel management was surprising as about 1/3 of those interviewed mentioned it.

Thirteen percent of those interviewed felt the public needed more information on NNCC classes, and workshops, and seminars in the form of advertising and flyers sent to employers. Two of these employers mentioned that at least one to three months (preferably more) notice is required for employees to obtain a release from work and be paid for attending class.

Forty-eight percent would like to see more evening, weekend, one-day seminars and more flexible scheduling. In general, there was a preference for short, intensive workshops, particularly for those at other times than the traditional Monday—Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Thirteen percent mentioned wanting either expansion of NNCC to a four-year institution or more graduate courses.

Additional courses mentioned later in the interview include geography, current events, merchandising, criminal justice for business people, environmental issues, government regulations, employee attitudes, gaming, journalism, music, medical transcription, bus driving, driver's education, parenting, futurism, planning, and tribal government.

Item #5:

Are there other occupational areas for which NNCC should offer one-year or two-year programs?

Although a number of different certificate/associate degree programs were suggested by employers, no one program was suggested by more than three people. A large number of employers had no suggestions, feeling that NNCC's offerings were broad enough.

The following programs were suggested: carpentry, surveying, plumbing, refrigeration, retail management, hotel management, dental hygiene, fire science, commercial art, four-year degree in business (several mentioned this), personnel management, agriculture, sheet metal, electronics (mentioned several times), civil engineering tech, culinary arts, criminal justice, and paralegal.

Item #6:

What continuing education do your employees have, if any? Could NNCC assist in offering continuing education programs?

Following is a list of employer responses. Twelve percent did indicate that NNCC could assist in offering continuing educational programs for their employees. There were a number of employers who stated that the continuing education requirements in their field are too specialized to become part of NNCC's regular offerings.

MSHA	6
First Aid	
State Insurance	
POST (law enforcement)	3
Bank Administration Institute	6
EMT Certification	
Principles of Banking	
Escrow Certification	
Credit Analysis Management	
FHA Classes	
Fire Department Certification	
Tax Certification	
Commercial Driver's License	
Hazardous Waste Management	2
Clerical	
Driver's License	

Item #7:

Cooperative Education is an area that we are considering for expansion. Are you interested in more information?

Sixty-five of the employers (75%) said they were interested in cooperative education programs. Seventeen of these employers cited a specific area. Office administration and accounting were most frequently mentioned. Several employers mentioned participation in cooperative education through NNCC or other institutions in the past, and were generally positive about the program.

Item #8:

Do you have any limited English-speaking employees? May we send you more information about NNCC's English as a Second Language program?

Twenty-two employers (24%) have limited English-speaking employees. Of the 22, 19 employers asked that we send information about NNCC's ESL classes. Several employers requested Spanish classes for employees and supervisors. Two employers mentioned that the limited-English does not negatively affect job performance but does limit opportunities for job change and advancement.

Item #9:

Do you have employees whose limited literacy skills reduce their productivity?
May we send you more information about literacy programs?

Seventeen (19%) of the employers said they have employees whose limited literacy reduces job productivity. Sixteen of these employers asked for more information on NNCC's literacy programs. Various comments were made, including the following:

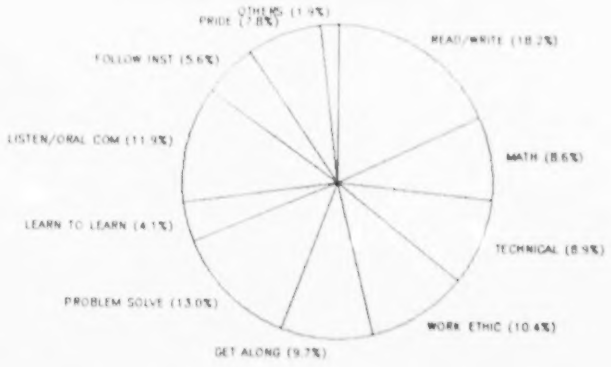
- *Does not reduce worker's productivity, though possibly restricted in other life skills areas.*
- *People don't know how to fill out applications!*
- *Need class in filling out job applications. Out of 38 clerical applicants, only one was typed.*
- *I don't hire anyone without literacy skills.*
- *Sometimes lacking in writing skills but have college degree.*

Item #10:

Choose the <u>three</u> most important qualities that NNCC should develop in its occupational students.

reading/writing skills
mathematics skills
technical skills
work ethic
getting along with others
problem-solving skills, creative thinking
learning how to learn
listening and oral communication
following instructions
pride in work
others?

QUALITIES NNCC SHOULD DEVELOP



This was a difficult question to respond to because all of the listed characteristics are desirable for employees.

The primacy of reading/writing skills is demonstrated. That only 8.9% of the employers mentioned *technical skills* as one of their three choices further demonstrates the common employer request, i.e., give me young people who have basic skills and a good attitude, and I'll teach them the technical skills.

Qualities added by the respondents included honesty, appearance, personal ethics, and personal planning skills.

Item #11:

Overall, what can NNCC do to improve services to the community?

Interviews attempted to elicit suggestions for any part of NNCC's mission. Many of the responses were similar to those for Item #2: the college is doing a good job, keep it up; don't know enough about the college to comment. Suggestions that were mentioned most frequently were:

- Need more advertising and public relations.
- More weekend and evening courses; flexible scheduling.
- Make NNCC a four-year college.
- A number of suggestions for specific workshops and seminars.

Sample comments:

- *Not too familiar with what college is doing — should expand programs so students don't have to leave Elko after high school to go to school.*
- *Need update on events coming for the business community, target businesses, evening and weekend seminars.*
- *Doing what a community college is supposed. Wonder why we have associates and masters programs but not baccalaureate.*
- *Offer abbreviated classes on a more regular basis. Make businesses aware of when short classes are taking place.*
- *Give courses at odd hours and days so people working different shifts can take advantage of the college.*
- *Doing a good job now.*
- *A greater offering of night courses.*
- *Need to expand academic offerings. Undergraduate classes need to be expanded. Occupational offerings are very good.*
- *Elko's isolation increases the need for occupational training in Elko. Difficult to say where we would be if we didn't have the college.*
- *Need more help and opportunities for Elko's Spanish community.*
- *Offer state training here in Elko.*
- *Continue to survey the community on a regular basis.*
- *Continue to grow and be willing to try new programs and hire quality people.*
- *Continue to provide quality education.*

Companies, Agencies, and Professionals Interviewed

Selland Construction
American Temporary Services
Canyon Construction
Builder's Mart
Colon & Alleman
Elko Regional Medical Center
El Aero
Edward D. Jones
Brico, Inc.
Burger King
C P National
Chester Plumbing
High Desert Engineering
Al Park Petroleum
J. C. Penney
Interior Wood Products
Security Pacific Bank
Pacific Western
Elko Chamber of Commerce
Control Tech Electric Company
Dewey Chevrolet
The Hub
Silver Dollar Casino
Red Lion
Smith Detroit Diesel
Arnold Machinery
Stockmen's Hotel
Elko County Assessor
Southwest Gas Corporation
JOIN
Elko County Manager
Manpower Temporary Services
Pepsi
First American Title
State Department of Transportation
Comptroller's Office
Michael Marfisi Law Office
Construction Related Services
State Department of Probation
Cooperative Extension Services
Elko County Library
U. S. Farmers Home Administration
Elko County Sherrif
Elko County School District
Geologic Survey Water Resourses
Nevada Employment Security
KELK Broadcasting
Big O Tire
Bannock Paving
Chilton Engineering
Chemex Labs
Bank of America
Federal Credit Union
Beno's
McMullen Agency
Cummings Intermountain
American Federal Savings
Albertson's
Boehler Construction
Ivory & Company
Inkleys
Insurance Management
Raley's
First Interstate Bank
Gem State Paper Supply
Elko Super 8 Motel
Golden Corral
Rodeway Inn
Parker Heating & Sheet Metal
Snyder-Nelson Mechanical
Valley Bank
Read & Powell
K-Market
Elko City Manager
Elko County Highway Department
TeMoak Tribe
Elko City Chief of Police
Frontier Title
Kafoury, Armstrong
Vocational Rehabilitation
State Motor Vehicle Department
District Attorney's Office
Nevada State Division of Forestry
Young Electric Sign Company
Vitality Center
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bureau of Land Management
Gallagher Ford
Humboldt National Forest
Elko Post Office
Nevada State Welfare
Vaughn, Hull, & Copenhaver

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